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ABSTRACT

A study examined language socialization in Dominica (West Indies), focusing on the use of a French-based creole, Patwa, in a situation of linguistic and social change. Despite claims that Patwa is integral to Dominican identity, rural caregivers choose to speak English to language-learning children, contributing to rapid attrition of Patwa. However, Patwa is still valued for intimate conversation among family and friends. Within this context are examined patterns of children's use of one Patwa affective marker within English speech, the imperative "ga," a short form of the Patwa verb "gade," "to look at." The ethnographic study of six children, aged 2-4 years, was carried out over 12 months in a rural village. Results indicate that while adults use "ga" almost strictly within Patwa utterances as an imperative or interjection to direct the attention of others to something in particular, children's use of "ga" is pervasively, although not randomly, used. Its use follows the same syntactic constraints as that of adults, but is used for impact and rhetorical force, to introduce new information, indicate a topic shift, or call attention to something or someone. It is used more often in play with peers and siblings than with adults. (MSE)

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Language Socialization in a Multilingual Creole Setting: Changing Practices and Ideologies in Dominica, W.I.

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In Dominica, a French-based creole commonly known as Patwa[1] has persisted since early French colonization along with standard and non-standard varieties of English, the official language since British rule. The most "standard" English is spoken in the capital town, while Patwa and varieties of English are spoken throughout the rural village population. Though denigrated by urbanites in the past, Patwa has figured more centrally in the state's project of building a unified post-colonial nation and revitalizing Dominican culture since Independence in 1978. Yet despite activist claims that Patwa is integral to Dominican identity, caregivers in rural villages now choose to speak English to language-learning children, contributing to a rapid attrition of Patwa through their everyday interactions. But while they assert that Patwa hinders children's education and restricts social mobility, they simultaneously value the language for intimate communication among family and friends, and claim it is more "expressive" than English. Children learn these complex ideologies as they learn language, and while they are now acquiring varieties of English as their first language, they nevertheless do manage to acquire some Patwa — especially those aspects which have particular affective saliency in their verbal environments — from an early age. This paper will discuss the contexts of language socialization in this situation of social and linguistic change, and will then present some preliminary findings on children's use of one affective marker within their English speech, the imperative *ga*, a short form of the Patwa verb *gadé*, 'to look at.'

The paper draws on ethnographic research carried out over 18 months between 1996 and

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1998 in one rural village. A longitudinal language socialization study of six children between the ages of 2 to 4 was carried out over twelve consecutive months. A minimum of two hours of children's naturally occurring speech, not elicited by the researcher, was audio-video recorded at regular one-month intervals during diverse daily activities with various family and community members. The child language acquisition and socialization paradigm developed by Ochs and Schieffelin (Ochs 1988; Ochs and Schieffelin 1984; Schieffelin 1990; also Kulick 1990), which maintains that children are socialized *through* language as well as socialized to *use* language, provides the theoretical and methodological framework. With its focus on everyday interactions between children and adults, this approach allows the study of how cultural practices and values are transmitted, transformed, or abandoned in a social group.

The Commonwealth of Dominica is a mountainous Eastern Caribbean island nation with a population of approximately 71,000 (Dominica Census Report 1991). Located between the French overseas departments of Guadeloupe and Martinique, France and England battled for control of the strategically positioned island during colonial expansion, and it repeatedly exchanged hands before becoming British in 1763. The French presence remained strong throughout this time, and enslaved Africans were increasingly imported by colonizers as a source of estate labor. A French-lexifier creole currently called Patwa developed and has remained in use in spite of the British imposition of English as the official language, and the lack of presence of standard French. Dominica was granted full independence from England in 1978, but has since retained English as its official language. Today language proficiency varies across geographic, generational, and socioeconomic lines, with the most Patwa spoken by village elders and the least by urban youths (Stuart 1993). An urban social movement promoting Patwa since Independence led to its standardization and literacy, but these efforts receive little enthusiasm

from rural villagers, and the language remains for most an exclusively oral medium.

The attitudes and ideologies surrounding English and Patwa are complex, and this is reflected in everyday language practices. Despite changing urban attitudes, the local language ideologies of Patwa-speaking rural villagers still reflect the negative attitudes and lack of prestige accorded the language since colonial times. Villagers recount experiences of being denigrated and labeled as "country folk" for speaking Patwa in town and for their children's past lack of success in school. The parents and grandparents of today's children report that when they were young, their teachers and parents would beat them for speaking Patwa, both at school and at home. Now adults claim that this is no longer necessary, but still maintain that Patwa negatively effects children's learning of English and generally "holds them back." However, adults claim that Patwa is superior to English in expressing one's "true" feelings and demonstrating solidarity with others, and continue to speak it with peers and family members during casual conversation. These ambivalent attitudes impact greatly upon children's language development, and are contributing to a rapid language shift away from Patwa to varieties of English in many rural villages.

In the village in which I did fieldwork, such a shift is visible across the past few generations of speakers. Today there remain only a few elderly monolingual Patwa speakers, typically over age 60. Speakers over age 40 generally claim to feel more comfortable speaking Patwa, but most command at least some variety of English. Adults between the ages of 18 and 40 tend to speak (varieties of) English much more fluently than their parents, though many claim to be less fluent to varying degrees in terms of speaking Patwa (though they claim to understand everything). These adults attempt to speak only English to their children with hopes of increasing their educational and future occupational opportunities. While the extent to which

they accomplish this varies, most preschool and school-age children growing up today are speaking English as their first and primary language. The majority have a very limited productive competence in Patwa, though depending on their age, social backgrounds, and other factors, their comprehension may far exceed this. Adult villagers are proud of the fact that their children seem to speak more English than they do, attributing much of this "success" to increasingly available and improved education. In recent years, school attendance rates have increased dramatically, as have the numbers of children passing the Common Entrance Exam and being awarded scholarships to attend secondary schools (this in the last seven years).

Most caregivers attempt to follow a strict method of speaking only English to children, especially when they are young, though this varies depending on their own proficiency and the context of the interaction. Language choice when speaking with children — as with other adults — depends on many factors, such as the type of activity involved, the setting, and other interlocutors taking part in the interaction. Caregivers tend to speak English most consistently during dyadic or small multiparty interactions with children, especially when involved in child-centered activities. But in spite of parental intentions, children are typically exposed to a great deal of Patwa in their everyday verbal environments as adult caregivers engage in lengthy conversations and gossip in Patwa with friends and other family members in their presence. Yet even during contexts where Patwa dominates, caregivers typically codeswitch into English when they turn to speak to a child or even when they report the speech of children within a Patwa conversation.

Nevertheless, there are many activities and contexts during which caregivers do speak Patwa directly to children. During affectively marked speech acts such as teasing, telling jokes, and disciplining children, caregivers frequently codeswitch into Patwa. Often caregivers switch

to Patwa to issue imperatives during goal-oriented activities such as bathing, dressing, and feeding, or when they have already told a child to do or not to do something several times in English with no result. These switches express their frustration when their patience has run out and they are just "fed up," according to many mothers. Adults generally maintain that Patwa is more expressive and "commanding" than English, claiming that jokes come out better, and that directives sound more forceful in Patwa. A mother of one focal child in the study, for example, answers the question "do you ever speak Patwa to your children?" with the following:

> Yes, as though if I have something to say fast. I will say *Michael pwen sa ba mwen* ['**Michael take that for me**'], *Nicky ay mété sa la* ['**Nicky go put that there**'], *Nicky pa fè sa* ['**Nicky don't do that**']. Something they make me vex I'll make a rage and talk Patwa to them but I don't, that is not something I really do to talk Patwa for them. My talking is English for them. (Mother, Interview, 9/9/97)[2]

Other caregivers and teachers at the village primary school reiterate this notion that Patwa better expresses one's "rage" than English, and seems to drive a point home when speaking to children. One teacher, a mother of three, says that though she does not normally speak Patwa to children, she will switch into it to discipline students at school and her own children at home:

> Yes sometimes I do. Even at home I do that you know because when you see I speak twice in English and they do not - um, not to say they don't understand, but as in the Patwa word comes out more you know, and then it's harder, its rough you know so as if they listen to me better (laughs) when I give it to them in Patwa. (Primary School Teacher, Interview, 9/15/97)

Thus while adults are willing to teach their children English at the potential expense of losing Patwa, they themselves continue to speak it to children in affectively marked ways in particular contexts that benefit their own motives and desires — namely for controlling their children.

Through their use of Patwa, adults reaffirm their rights as more mature, culturally knowledgeable members to control children's lives and actions. But as caregivers and even teachers use Patwa in these ways, children learn specific ideas about and how to use the

language. As adults use Patwa to joke, poke fun at other people, assert their dominance over both children and others, gossip, criticize, chastise, and order others around, children learn to associate Patwa with these qualities and will occasionally use it to accomplish similar pragmatic functions. It is in this context that children have begun to employ the Patwa imperative *ga*, meaning 'look,' much more frequently than adults, in their English speech, and to fulfill a range of pragmatic functions including attention getting, emphasis, and affective marking.

In spite of repeated assurances by caregivers and teachers that children speaking Patwa is no longer a "problem," most are very concerned about the extent to which children of all ages are using *ga* within their English speech. This is understandable, as adults continually struggle to provide their children with the most "standard" or "good" English they can so that children may succeed in school. All village adults that I questioned about *ga* told me that it is a Patwa term, and were bothered that children were using it to such an extent in their daily speech. One concerned mother put it, "They taking that piece of *ga* and they putting it in the English." Yet no one felt that children were using it in grammatically incorrect ways; rather, while codeswitching is an acceptable practice for adults, it is much less tolerated in the speech of children. Many also seemed somewhat perplexed by the fact that children chose to use that particular Patwa word to such a greater extent than any other.

My recordings and observations of adult speech indicate that most use *ga* almost strictly within Patwa utterances as an imperative or interjection used to direct the attention of others towards something in particular. It often appears as an imperative in commonly heard, very formulaic phrases that negatively evaluate someone, such as *ga djèl li, ga fidji 'y,* or *ga kalité 'y*, meaning 'look at his or her mouth,' 'face,' or 'mannerisms,' respectively. These are usually spoken fast in a harsh tone of voice, and typically refer to someone, often a child, who is acting

particularly "rude," "greedy," or otherwise disagreeable. Adults rarely if ever say *gadè* in place of *ga* in these types of phrases, even though it is regularly used in Patwa speech as an imperative or a main verb (such as "*i ka gadé sa*" 'he is looking at that'). *Ga* is restricted to second-person imperative usage only, but it additionally functions in adult speech as an affective marker expressing shock, surprise, emphasis, and so on, and appears to be so salient that young children pick up on this function as soon as they begin to talk.

Children's use of *ga* is so pervasive that it has been described to me as "rampant" and heard "everywhere" by villagers. "All the children like to say that," says one mother, and many others agree. But even though it appears so frequently in their English speech, children's use of *ga* follows the same syntactic constraints as adults, and does not appear randomly. Like adults, children use it as an imperative with additional pragmatic functions, particularly for emphasis and affective marking. It is used for impact and rhetorical force, to introduce new information, to initiate a topic shift, or to call attention to something or someone in their surroundings. For children, the social meanings of *ga* extend beyond simply telling someone to "look" at something, as they will often do the latter before switching to *ga*, which carries greater affective weight. A fifteen-year-old secondary school student once defined it for me as, "Wow, look at that!" When *ga* is used, it signifies a change in context and is a means by which children can shape and reshape interactions by emphatically calling attention to something they deem as relevant or important. As I began recording the focal group in my study, all the children, including the youngest at 23 months, were already using *ga* in their everyday speech to point out various things, people, and events in their environment. They also used the more unmarked English 'look' encouraged by their caregivers, usually at least twice as much as *ga* on average. However, *ga* seemed to carry for them very strong affective meaning that was appropriate in

particular situations, and they were attentive to the pragmatic saliency of their switch when they did use it.

In example #1, Reiston (age 3 years) is sitting on his grandfather's (G) lap outside on their veranda, and is about to begin coloring with a new box of cra;ons. He hands a crayon to his grandfather, but before he has a chance to color with it, Reiston prematurely jumps to the conclusion that the crayon cannot "write":

1 R: Papa / I giving you a pretty one
2 [R gives a crayon to G]
3 G: Yes
4 R: *Ga* it - *ga* it not *matjé*ing ['**look** it is not **writ**ing'] / *Ga*
5 G: Yes it *matjé*ing ['yes it is **writ**ing'] / Yes
6 [G makes a mark in the coloring book with the crayon]
7 R: *Ga* it *matjé*ing ['**look** it **writ**ing']
8 G: Yes
(Reiston 6/26/97)

In this example, Reiston is using the Patwa verb *matjé* according to local patterns of language use and codeswitching in the village. His use of *ga* here represents in all three cases an affective marker as well as an imperative, expressing his shock that the crayon does not write, calling attention to this problem, and telling his grandfather to look at it all at once. His first three usages in line 4 initially call attention to this problem, as it has been assumed up until this point that the crayons would in fact write. Once his grandfather shows that the crayon can write, Reiston again calls attention to this new information with his use of *ga*.

That *ga* serves as a highly affectively marked attention getter for children is seen not only in the frequency with which they use it, but also in its positioning within discourse sequences in relation to more unmarked English alternatives, such as 'look,' 'watch,' or 'see.' In example #2, Alisia's mother (M) is plaiting her hair and putting barrettes in it, when Alisia (age 2 years 7 months) notices a turtle on one of the barrettes and mistakes it for a crab. She then tries to get

the attention of her brother Teddy (age 5) to show him, but he does not look at her. By the third attempt, she uses *ga* for more emphasis, and successfully grabs his attention:

1 [A picks up a barrette from the table and holds it up towards T]
2 A>T: (in high pitched voice) Come Teddy! / Come see a crab [re: on barrette]
3 T: I putting in the crayon [re: back in box]
4 A>T: (squealing) Look crab look crab look crab
5 M>A: Stop stop [re: squirming around as trying to get T's attention]
6 A>T: *Ga* Teddy! / Watch that
7 [T looks at the barrette in A's hand]
(Alisia 12/17/97)

Before Alisia says *ga*, however, she has tried telling Teddy to "come," "come see," and "look" three times to no avail. The situation has clearly escalated at this point, and *ga* acts as an intensifier when Teddy does not pay attention.

Children tend to use *ga* more often in the context of play with peers and siblings, when they are less likely to be told "less noise" or "no Patwa" by always vigilant adults. Many caregivers blame their children's use of *ga* on their peers, claiming they learn it from other children at school and then bring it home where it is then learned by younger preschool children. Alisia's use of *ga*, for example, increases on average over four times as much when her older brother and sister (ages 4 and 10 at the start of the study) are present compared to when she is alone with her mother. Though many parents generally do let their children's use of *ga* slip by, as it is used so frequently everyday, Alisia's mother often tries to correct her children from saying it, typically with little success. None of the other family members try to correct one another's use of *ga*, and on one occasion, Alisia had said it 19 times to her father without repair before her mother came into the room from the kitchen and told her, "Not *ga*. [Say] Daddy look at that" (7/18/97). The following final example #3 shows another of her many attempts to correct her children. Alisia (2 years 3 months) initiates a common game she and Teddy (4 years) play, where they point at something outside, such as a mango in a tree or a plane passing

overhead, and claim it to be their 'own.' Here, Alisia begins by claiming a "motobike," which is most likely a tree branch or stick on the ground nearby:

1	A:	(pointing at the ground) *Ga* my motobike! [motorbike]
2	M>A:	Not *ga* / Look at my motorbike
3	A>M:	No / Is not your motorbike [misunderstands M's repair]
4	(pause)	
5	A:	(pointing towards the sky) *Ga ga ga* my bird / *Ga* my bird
6	T:	(pointing towards the sky) *Ga ga* my bird
7	T:	┌ *Ga* my bird
8	M:	└ (to A and T) Not *ga*
9	M:	Look at my bird
10	A:	(speaking louder and faster) *Ga ga ga* my bird! / (loudly) My - my bird my bird!
11	T:	(chanting) Plenty bird / Plenty bird / Plenty bird / Plenty bird

(Alisia 7/18/97)

As children acquire the languages of their communities, they learn cultural and social practices, ideologies about language, and cultural views generally. But as the above preliminary analysis of children's use of *ga* illustrates, children are active participants in their socialization, able to choose among and even alter cultural or linguistic practices. In this situation of rapid language shift, children are learning those aspects of Patwa with greater affective marking, and in their own usage through codeswitching are making these aspects even more affectively marked. However, what this means for the future of Patwa remains to be seen.

Notes

1. The spelling of the term *Patwa* (rather than *Patois*) follows the orthography developed by the government-sponsored Konmité Pou Etid Kwéyòl (Committee for Creole Studies) in *Dominica's English-Creole Dictionary* (Fontaine and Roberts 1992). The language is now also known more "officially" as Kwéyòl, but I have chosen to call it Patwa because that is the name used by residents in the village in which I did fieldwork (as well as in rural villages throughout the island).

2. All names have been changed to maintain confidentiality.

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